

Scottish Affairs Committee: Coronavirus and Scotland follow-up

Scottish Care response to the Call for Evidence – June 2023

Scottish Care welcomes this opportunity to respond to Scottish Affairs Committee's Call for Evidence on its follow up inquiry into Coronavirus and Scotland.

Scottish Care is a membership organisation and the representative body for independent sector social care services in Scotland. We represent over 400 organisations, which totals almost 1000 individual services, delivering residential care, nursing care, day care, care at home and housing support services.

Over the course of the pandemic, Scottish Care's members were at the forefront of the frontline response caring for older people and those with disabilities in residential settings and/or in those individuals' homes.

It was clear from an early stage that the pandemic would have an unprecedented impact on the social care sector and that the sector would require support in navigating this new and challenging landscape. Scottish Care sought to support our members throughout this period through a variety of means and channels.

As a national representative body Scottish Care was also at the heart of debate and discussion during this time, providing detailed and vocal response to the numerous issues that were faced by the social care sector.

Scottish Care continues to support our members to respond to and manage pandemic and post-pandemic challenges. As a sector, the very real and detrimental impacts of Coronavirus and related decision-making continue to be felt and have resulted in a social care landscape of reduced resilience and capacity. There are very real concerns currently regarding the future of the social care sector given the need for urgent support and radical reform which values its contribution to society, wellbeing and the economy. From Scottish Care's engagement with our members, it is clear that many in the sector - recognising that many skilled and dedicated people have already left - are experiencing significant morale and burnout challenges. These predominantly stem from a continued sense of feeling undervalued and under-recognised for both their individual professionalism and their sector's role, without clear, positive and inclusive routes of reform.

Our response to the Committee's specific questions is as follows:

How well has your industry or sector recovered to pre-pandemic levels?

It is very clear that the social care sector has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels and is instead facing its most significant workforce and sustainability crisis. Existing

challenges within the sector, not least those relating to lack of value and under-investment, were further exacerbated by the pandemic. Unfortunately, despite increased public and political awareness of the sector, effective mechanisms for supporting the sector and tackling urgent issues have not been implemented in most instances.

In terms of the social care workforce, this has resulted in substantial recruitment and retention difficulties. In relation to staff vacancies in services:

- 75% of care homes for older people had vacancies in 2021 compared to 55% in 2020.
- 71% of housing support services had vacancies in 2021 compared to 60% in 2020.
- 71% of care at home services had vacancies in 2021 compared to 59% in 2020.
- In care homes for older people that offer nursing provision, 64% had nursing vacancies in 2021 compared to 48% in 2020.

In terms of filling these vacancies, 81% of care at home services, 74% of care homes for older people and 73% of housing support services reported difficulties, all of which are considerably above the average for all types of care service¹.

Issues of increased workloads stemming from regulatory and oversight pressures, staff shortages, burnout and increased sickness and absence levels, as well as a general shortage of suitable individuals with the necessary skills and interest are all cited as reasons for these vacancy levels and workforce difficulties.

Ongoing wider challenges to value, pay, terms and conditions also significantly contribute to recruitment and retention pressures:

“Staff are not adequately valued, engaged, or rewarded for their vitally important role. The workforce is predominantly female and poor terms and conditions for staff contribute to recruitment difficulties, rising sickness absence and high vacancy levels. This puts the capacity, sustainability, and quality of care services at a considerable risk” – Audit Scotland²

In terms of sustainability, the social care sector across both care home and home care provision is experiencing unprecedented risks to its future viability with many services considering or resorting to closure or significantly reduced levels of provision. The threats posed by the cost of living crisis, fuel costs, energy hikes and sustained low funding and commissioning levels are profoundly impacting provision and the ability to not only recover from the pandemic but for services to survive at all.

Whilst the number of services hasn't yet changed dramatically since pre-pandemic levels, the number of care home residents has reduced by between 4000 and 5000 since 2019³.

For care at home services, recent research undertaken by Scottish Care with its members indicated that:

¹ [Staff vacancies 2021.pdf \(sssc.uk.com\)](#)

² [Social care briefing \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Care Home - Insights in social care: statistics for Scotland - Support provided or funded by health and social care partnerships in Scotland 2021/22 - Insights in social care: statistics for Scotland - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

- 100% of respondents were concerned about their service's sustainability
- 53% had handed work or contracts back to Local Authorities due to workforce or financial sustainability issues
- 76% had had to reduce or limit the number of visits with longer travel times

The pressures continuing to face these forms of provision have had a direct impact on healthcare effectiveness too, with unprecedented pressure on the NHS and record levels of delayed discharge figures owing to a lack of social care support to enable people to leave hospitals. This led to the announcement of resource from the Scottish Government to purchase temporary care home places as an interim measure⁴, but does not solve the wider and longer-term challenges.

Organisations such as the Scottish Human Rights Commission have also highlighted significant concerns about what social care support is likely to be available into the future for those whose care and support was diminished, stopped or inaccessible during the pandemic⁵. It is clear that many of the damaging policy and practice decisions relating to reductions in support, particularly preventative and earlier stage interventions such as day care support and home care hours, will continue to impact not only on what the sector looks like and can deliver into the future but on individual lives and outcomes.

How adequate was UK Government and Scottish Government support for your industry or sector to get back to pre-pandemic levels?

The scale of the ongoing challenge is indicative of insufficient Government support for social care.

For example, support for social care sustainability payments ended in June 2022 which Scottish Care believes to have been premature given the recognised challenges posed by ongoing cost of living and energy pressures. The cessation of other schemes such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (September 2021) and the Social Care Staff Support Fund (March 2023) have also impacted on social care providers who have required to adapt and often cover the gaps left by the loss of these supports despite an ongoing albeit reduced need for them.

It is also important to recognise that for the social care sector, the pandemic is not a thing of the past but continues to impact practice and resources directly and indirectly. There has been a failure to recognise and appreciate the ongoing costs of preventing and managing outbreaks through for instance infection prevention and control measures, rigorous cleaning procedures, enhanced laundry and staff support. Costs such as PPE provision are not a short-term or emergency-only factor in the funding of social care services and these costs must therefore be built into future cost modelling in a consistent and sustainable way.

Ongoing challenging areas such as negotiations on the future of the National Care Home Contract in Scotland, which at the current time remains under severe threat

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⁵ [COVID-19, Social Care and Human Rights Monitoring Report \(scottishlegal.com\)](https://www.scottishlegal.com/COVID-19_Social_Care_and_Human_Rights_Monitoring_Report)

due to insufficient funding for the care home sector⁶, serve to further highlight a continued lack of recognition as to the role, purpose and value of social care supports and the need for enhanced governmental support and investment to aid recovery and future resilience.

How effective was UK Government and Scottish Government spending around the pandemic?

We have sought to answer this question in terms of spending that related to financial support to the social care sector during the pandemic.

The immediate financial pressures faced by independent social care providers, not least due to the increased costs of PPE and those associated with the loss of staffing as workers required to isolate through infection or shielding, meant there was an urgent need to establish financial support. This process took some time to establish and for the relevant criteria to be developed. Throughout this time Scottish Care worked with the Scottish Government, COSLA and Chief Finance Officers of Local Authorities to secure financial support for the care sector.

90% of care home provision and approximately 60% of care at home provision in Scotland is delivered by independent providers - most of which are small, locally and/or family run businesses. Business support funds that were available to small businesses during the pandemic generally provided organisations with a lump sum that was designed to help them withstand the impact of the pandemic. However, social care providers were not eligible to apply for these funds and a separate funding process was developed by the Health and Social Care Directorate within the Scottish Government specifically for social care providers.

Social care providers could apply for reimbursement of funds for the additional costs that they incurred as a direct result of the pandemic. The financial support arrangements for social care providers were referred to as sustainability payments. Providers who were signatories to the National Care Home Contract could also claim under-occupancy payments where their care homes were under-occupied as a direct result of the pandemic. Providers who were not signatories could also claim under-occupancy payments where a local authority commissioned services from them or would usually have done so had it not been for the pandemic. Local authorities were tasked with receiving and assessing applications for sustainability and under-occupancy payments from the care sector and distributing the relevant funds.

The applications for sustainability payments had to be made retroactively and required to be heavily evidenced - social care providers had to provide extracts of their ledgers or their management accounts showing the increase in their operating costs for the period for which they were seeking payment. At times providers had to undergo an open book exercise in order for sustainability payments to be granted.

Additionally, the terms on which sustainability and under-occupancy funds were available to care providers changed on a number of occasions during the pandemic

⁶ [Fears of Scottish care home closures after contract stalemate - BBC News](#)

and Scottish Care dedicated significant time to trying to resolve individual and collective complaints and failures in these systems.

There were inconsistencies in the approach being taken to applications for under-occupancy and sustainability payments by local authorities. Local authorities did not have sufficient resources to process the applications and at times did not explain why applications were refused or partially granted.

The Social Care Staff Support Fund was established by the Scottish Government in June 2020 in an attempt to ensure that social care workers would not face financial hardship as a result of testing positive for COVID-19 and having to isolate. In such circumstances, social care providers were required to pay social care workers and then recoup the costs from their local authority. There were however long delays in payments being reimbursed to social care providers and Scottish Care worked closely with trade unions, COSLA and the Scottish Government to try to resolve this issue.

Therefore whilst some financial support was made available, access issues, inconsistencies, payment delays and extremely burdensome application processes meant that these supports proved ineffective for some providers, who were faced with managing the urgencies of tackling the pandemic and maintaining quality care with significantly reduced capacity, resources and supports.

How much did UK Government and Scottish Government financial support assist in the recovery of your industry or sector to pre-pandemic levels?

Much of our response so far has detailed the social care sector's experience of financial support and its role in recovery. However, there are some lessons from the pandemic around the planning, distribution and consistency of financial support which are useful to reflect:

The extension of many funding supports was regularly announced on the week, if not the day, that the fund was due to end. This type of intervention did not allow for longer-term financial viability and business planning and affected the stability of organisations. There were a number of care home closures during the pandemic and due to its lasting financial impact coupled with the rising cost of living the sector is currently experiencing the highest level of care home closures in Scottish Care's existence.

Contingency planning for future emergencies should consider how financial support and funding can be delivered to social care providers in a way which meets the needs of, and adequately sustains the long-term viability of, those operating in the sector.

Any model of financial support for the social care sector must:

- ensure that there is a consistent national approach to the delivery of financial support across Scotland;
- avoid additional pressure being placed on social care providers;
- permit social care to access financial support that is commensurate to the funding available for businesses in other sectors without additional demands being placed on them during the application process; and

- deliver the required funding without delay.

Further support from the UK Government in relation to immigration and visa costs for those entering the social care workforce would have been helpful and needs to be prioritised into the future. The impact of the Brexit decision has had a wholly disproportionate effect on the Scottish social care sector and has undoubtedly impacted on its ability to recover from the pandemic and its aftermath.

About Scottish Care

Scottish Care is a membership organisation and the representative body for independent sector social care services in Scotland. We represent over 400 organisations, which totals almost 1000 individual services, delivering residential care, nursing care, day care, care at home and housing support services.

Our membership includes organisations of varying types and sizes, amongst them single providers, small and medium sized groups, national providers, employee-owned and family run services. Our members deliver a wide range of registered services for older people as well as those with long term conditions, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, dementia or mental health challenges.

Working on behalf of a range of providers, Scottish Care seeks to provide a unified voice for both members and the wider independent care sector. This includes staff working in and those who access independent sector care services.

For the purposes of clarity and understanding, the independent sector covers private, charitable, not for profit and employee-owned social care organisations.

In Scotland, the independent social care sector across day care, care home, care at home and housing support services for adults contributes to:

- The employment of 100,590 people, which is over 48% of the total social services workforce, including over 4,000 nurses⁷
- The provision of 90% of care home places for adults⁸
- The delivery of 60% of all home care support provided across Scotland⁹

Scottish Care is committed to supporting a quality orientated, independent sector that offers real choice and value for money. Our aim is to create an environment in which care providers can continue to deliver and develop the high-quality care that communities and citizens require and deserve.

⁷ [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2021 Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

⁸ [Care Home Census for Adults in Scotland \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](https://publichealthscotland.scot)

⁹ [Care at Home - Insights in social care: statistics for Scotland - Support provided or funded by health and social care partnerships in Scotland 2021/22 - Insights in social care: statistics for Scotland - Publications - Public Health Scotland](https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications)

Scottish Care is happy to be contacted to provide further information relating to this submission should it be required.

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